United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Parliamentarians for Global Action, scheduled to visit Haiti to witness implementation of Governors Island Agreement, express concern at violence in Port-au-Prince and call on Haitian authorities to guarantee safety of Haitian Parliamentarians and their own delegation.

+ Secretary-General appeals to Morocco and POLISARIO to honour obligations under Settlement Plan for Western Sahara after cancellation of New York talks; says he will continue efforts for implementation of Plan and registration of potential voters.

+ UNHCR charters freight train to transport relief supplies from Europe to refugees in Georgia and Azerbaijan next month.

+ Secretary-General, in report to General Assembly, says prospects for nuclear-weapon-free zone in Middle East have improved recently; but more openness, transparency and confidence needed; urges States in region to improve security cooperation during ongoing peace process.

+ General Assembly to elect five non-permanent members to Security Council on Friday.

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A delegation of Parliamentarians for Global Action, which was invited by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Haiti to visit that country, today called on the Haitian military authorities to give them an immediate and public guarantee of their safety as a precondition for their visit. The Parliamentarians, who are holding their annual meeting at United Nations Headquarters, said their delegation was ready to depart as soon as they received the guarantee.

The Parliamentarians were to provide international witness and support for implementation of the Governors Island Agreement, but told Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali that they were concerned about reports of violence in Port-au-Prince and intimidation of members of the Haitian

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Parliament. They called on the authorities in Haiti to give an undertaking that those Haitian Parliamentarians in the country, and those currently in the United States but wanting to return, would be given full protection by the military and the police there.

The members of Parliamentarians for Global Action went on to say that the opportunity still existed for the Governors Island accord to be implemented, either by the agreed deadline of 30 October or shortly thereafter. They appealed to the authorities in Haiti and to President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Government to display the necessary goodwill and political resolve to ensure that that happened.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today appealed to Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO) to live up to their obligations under the Settlement Plan for Western Sahara after direct talks between the parties, scheduled to resume last Monday, were cancelled. The POLISARIO delegation found it impossible to resume the talks, which were initiated three months ago at Laayoune, because the Moroccan delegation included former POLISARIO officials, according to a United Nations spokesman.

The Secretary-General said he regretted that the parties had not found it possible to accept any options offered by Special Representative Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, in consultation with members of the Security Council, to overcome the procedural difficulties and enable the resumption of talks. He expressed the hope that a dialogue would be resumed in due course. In the meantime, with the support of the Security Council, he was determined to continue efforts for the implementation of the Settlement Plan and to proceed with the identification and registration of potential voters in the Western Sahara referendum.

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The United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has chartered a freight train to carry more than 1,000 metric tons of relief supplies to refugees and displaced people in war-ravaged Georgia and Azerbaijan next month. The unprecedented rail shipment will carry wheat flour, vegetable oil, sugar and other supplies purchased throughout Europe and is scheduled to depart from Finland before mid-November. The cargo will be loaded onto secure rail wagons and accompanied by armed security guards for the two- to three-week journey. The train is expected to stop first in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, before traveling on to the Georgian capital, Tbilisi.

UNHCR logistics and transport specialists said shipping the humanitarian supplies by rail -- at an estimated cost of $250,000 --- would be much cheaper and safer than carrying them by truck to Georgia and Azerbaijan. UNHCR estimated that some 300,000 people in Azerbaijan are in need of assistance. Another 135,000 people need help in Georgia, including some 70,000 who recently fled the fighting in the Abkhazia region.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said that the prospects for the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East are better now than a few years ago, but that the openness, transparency and confidence required would go beyond anything now practised in the region. In a report to the General Assembly dated 25 October, he said that a nuclear-weapon-free zone could not be conceived in a political vacuum, separate from the process of mutual reconciliation. He urged all States in the region to take every opportunity in the ongoing peace process to build bridges of cooperation on security and related matters.

The Secretary-General noted that key obstacles to a nuclear-weapon-free zone were gradually being reduced or even eliminated. Some States were directly negotiating, the "nuclear postures" of extraregional powers were less of a complicating factor, and the threat posed by conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction was more widely appreciated than ever before. The creation of such a zone should neither lead nor lag behind inter-State negotiations on the broader aspects of a peace settlement, but should proceed in parallel, he concluded.

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The General Assembly will meet on Friday to elect five non-permanent members for two-year terms on the Security Council, a United Nations spokesman said today. Voting is by secret ballot, and a two-thirds majority of States present and voting in the Assembly is required for election.

Candidates for election to the Council are put forward by their Regional Groups, the spokesman noted. For the Asian States there is one retiring member and one endorsed candidate (Oman); for the African States there are two retiring members, one endorsed candidate (Rwanda) and two interested candidates (Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria); for the Eastern European States there is one retiring member and two interested candidates (Belarus and the Czech Republic); for the Latin American and Caribbean States there is one retiring member and one endorsed candidate (Argentina); and for the Western European and Other States there are no retiring members and no candidates.

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